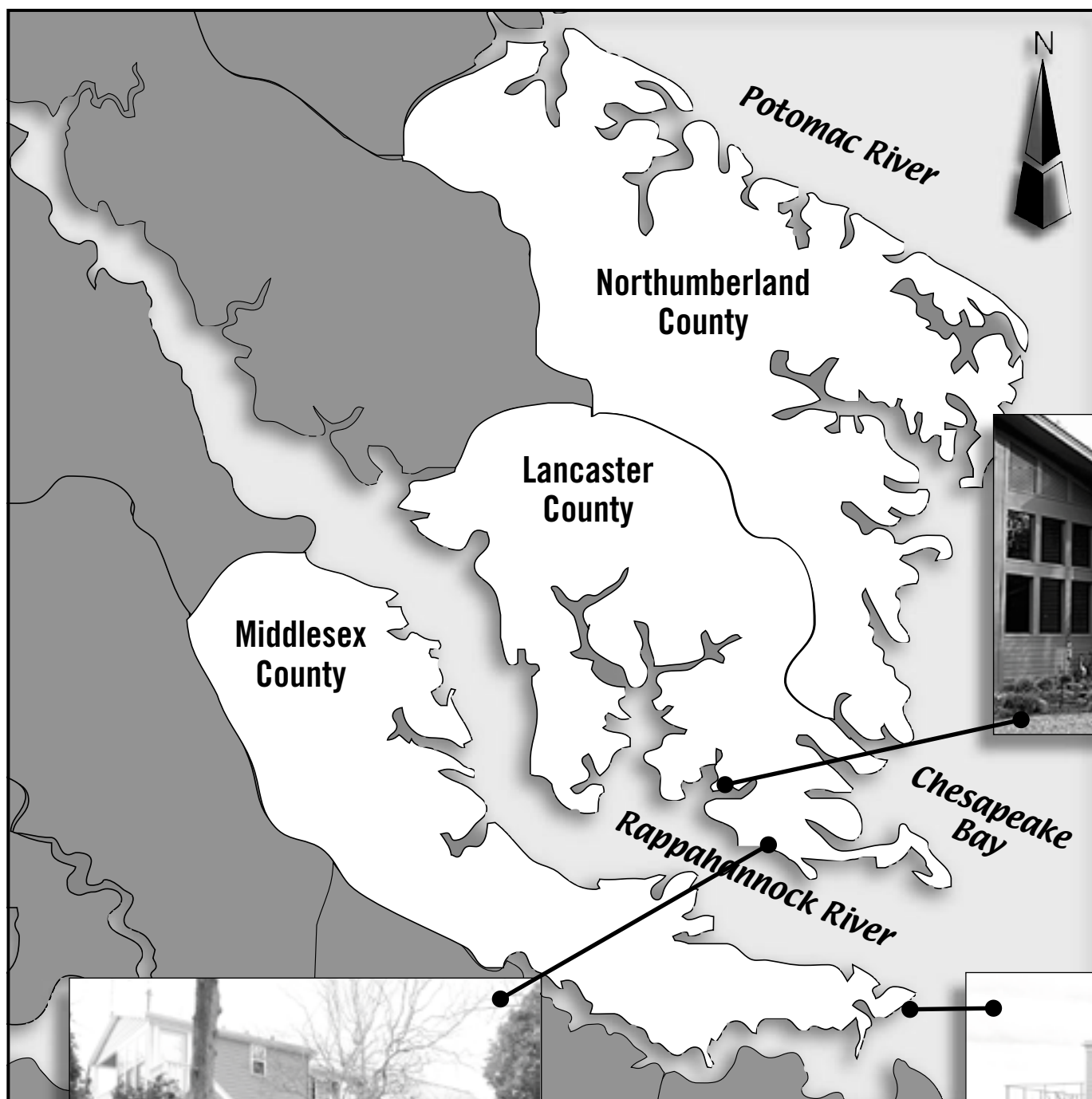


# Unlocking the Door

*Peek inside three homes in the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula and discover the key to their success. Windows on the Bay takes readers on a tour of interesting homes in the area where owners have put just as much thought into the interior design of the house as the exterior.*



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**Wright Home > page 18**

# Capturing sun, wind and rain

by Tom Chillemi

Pete and Pam Wright designed their home at Stingray Point in Deltaville to bring the outside inside. By using an open floor plan there are views of the Chesapeake Bay or water from every room except one.

Pam calls it a “California-style” beach house. Flat roofs double as elevated decks – one for sunrise, the other for sunset.

The bank of windows face west and south to absorb the winter sun, warming the whole house. In summer when the sun is at a higher angle, its rays bounce off the treated windows so heat gain is not a problem.

Doors and windows on the second floor can be opened on warm days to let the hot air out and let the cool Bay breeze in.

Pete grew up in Washington, D.C., with an open floor plan. His father was an architect who would take him to visit houses he had designed that were under construction. “This house is a composite of all the houses he did,” said Pete, who gave most of the credit to his wife. “Pam spent hundreds of hours going through Architectural Digests so we could give ideas to our architect.”

For example, they use a system of thin horizontal cables, spaced about four inches apart, under railings that allow nearly unencumbered views. The cables not only take the place of balusters, but give song birds a place to perch.

Pam researched all the different types of stoves. “During our travels, we never passed a large town without her taking me to gourmet kitchen stores to look at stoves,” said Pete.

The Wrights opted for a large gas stove in the kitchen, where they love to create gourmet dishes. Pam took cooking classes in Thailand and, with the Thai dishes, she often uses



Specially treated windows drink in the warm sun in winter, but block out summer rays.

her home-grown herbs.

During college Pete was a chef in the summers and holidays at the exclusive Cosmos Club in Washington, D.C. He

substituted for different chefs when they took time off, so he learned the cooking art from all angles.

The Wrights have lived in

Deltaville full time for 12 years, and before that visited what has been a resort area for decades.

Pete Wright is a well-known

attorney who represents children with special educational needs. He successfully argued a special education case before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Pam Wright is a psychotherapist who worked with children and families. She created the website [wrightslaw.com](http://wrightslaw.com) to help guide parents of children who need special education.

## Braced for nature

The Wrights built their house near the end of Route 33 on the Chesapeake Bay. Here, the Bay is almost 40 miles wide, and that is a lot of open water, or “fetch,” for a nor’easter wind to gain strength across the open water.

So the Wrights engineered structural solutions to make it stand up to wind and water.

First, the house is raised out of the flood zone. But that makes the two-story house actually three stories high. Also, because of its “L” shape, “it’s like a huge sail, so it catches the wind,” explained Pete.

To be on the safe side, the house has eight steel beams under its siding to reinforce the water side, where high winds can come from.

The walls are known as “shear walls.” The vertical studs are braced with horizontal 2x4s every 16 inches. The studs are covered on the interior with plywood. This prevents any twisting action of the house due to wind loading, said Pete. The doors latch and close in four places so rain can’t be driven around the edges.

All the studs are secured with hurricane straps.

The exterior is Hardiplank, a cement-like siding that resembles wood.

The flat roofs are made of a rubberized compound and are part of a rainwater collection system. ☔

(See related story on page 20)



Nature is close by. The tall pine tree on the far side of the house is a roost for an eagle.



The Chesapeake Bay is right at the back door.



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# Cleaner water nature's way

by Tom Chillemi

Pete Wright has an inventive mind. A few years ago, this special education attorney devised a way to get iron out of his water. The system was simple. By pumping well water through a regular garden hose and spraying it through the nozzle, the water was aerated. When the microscopic specks of iron in the water came into contact with the air, they condensed and turned into oxidized iron, so they could be filtered out of the water.

Residents of the eastern end of Middlesex County know that without a filter and water softener these iron deposits usually end up around the sink or toilet.

Now, Pete and Pam Wright have gone a step further. Based on Pam's hundreds of hours of internet research, and after seeing a cistern in Hawaii, they created a system to collect rainwater from the roof of their new house and use it as potable water. Pete explained that nature has distilled the water for them to use.

They have had the water tested for every possible contaminant. "The water came out as good a quality as they had ever seen," said Pete.

It's as clean if not cleaner than any water that could be taken from the ground, especially in the Deltaville area, he said.

Much of the coastal areas of the Lower Bay have poor qual-

## About the owners

Pete Wright is an attorney who represents children with special educational needs and Pam Wright is a psychotherapist who worked with children and families.

As a team they have built an extensive website ([www.wrightslaw.com](http://www.wrightslaw.com)) that is a free legal primer for parents advocating for their children. Their publishing company, Harbor House Law Press, publishes books, digital publications, and DVDs about special education law and advocacy. They have written five books on special education.

Pete and Pam travel around the country, leading training seminars and special education "boot camp" conferences for parents, educators, advocates, and attorneys. ☛

ity drinking water due to a 50-mile wide impact crater formed millions of years ago when an asteroid hit the earth off of what is now Cape Charles. It plowed deep enough into the earth to jumble the layers of earth and aquifers so they don't flush. The water gets trapped and collects minerals.

Wright's rainwater collection system diverts the first part of a rain storm, which is used to wash off the roof, before collecting water. One inch of rain is good for 600 gallons of water. Four tanks hold a total of 2,200 gallons.

"Rainwater is the best water in the world," said Pete. "The water is the softest you can get and only slightly acidic, no more than well water," he said. A teaspoon of baking soda per 100 gallons is enough to neutralize it.

The water is run through a regular five-micron filter and purified with ultraviolet light from a special bulb. By keeping the stored water in the shade, algae growth is stopped.

The Wrights considered installing a rainwater collection system when the house was built, but postponed acting because of the cost. After Pam researched it on the internet, they decided to install the system. Pete estimates he has invested \$3,000 in the water system.

An environmental advantage is that less rainwater washes from

his property, so fewer contaminants can run off into the Bay.

For those who want a low-tech solution, Pete said he used to collect rainwater in coolers, put the water in a gallon jug with a hole in the top, warm it in a microwave, and use it to wash his hair and rinse the hard water off after a shower. "It makes your hair feel like you just came from the beauty parlor," he said. ☛



Rainwater collected from the roof of the Wrights' house provides potable water that is stored in four tanks that hold 550 gallons each. The water is run through a regular five-micron filter, available at local hardware stores, and then purified with ultraviolet light from a special bulb. Nature has distilled the water so it's "soft" and requires no treatment to remove iron or minerals. The system costs about \$3,000, not including labor. An environmental advantage is that less rainwater washes from the property, so less potential contamination reaches the Bay.



Windows give a view of the Bay or other waterways from the living room.

